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Frenetic election campaign grips Jhalakati

Ministers, senior leaders canvass for Amu

From Shehab Ahmed and Aroop Talukder

NALCHITI, July 27: Never before has this sleepy, remote corner of the country seen so many Pajero four wheelers and microbuses carrying ministers and ruling party stalwarts as they covered every nook and corner of the area seeking vote for Awami League heavyweight Md. Hossain Amu.

What otherwise would have been a dull, routine by-election in the Jhalakati-2 parliamentary seat, which the mainstream opposition parties have shunned, has become the centre of attention. The seat fell vacant after the death of Jatiya Party (Mizan-Manju) MP, Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto.

His widow Elen Bhutto poses the biggest challenge for Amu who was made food minister from technocrat quota a few months ago.

With only three days to the election, a tireless Amu, aided by ministers, party colleagues and relatives, is campaigning door to door. Foreign Minister Abdus Samad Azad was among many who made it through a slippery road to Manpasha today after arriving here in the morning.

Manpasha happens to be stronghold of Bhutto. She is making a silent, virtually invisible campaign there as she knows she should have the sympathy of the electorate.

That makes it all the more important for Amu to win there. He is promising along with all the ministers and stalwarts a balanced development of the remotest corner of the country.

"Development would roll down the road, something we would like to do as a mark of respect for late Bhutto," said Tofti Ahmed yesterday.

"This area never had a minister in all these years. So we want him to do something," said Parvez Hossain, a contractor sipping tea at Nalchiti bazar.

However, that is something time will decide. Meantime, election fever in the constituency is running very high.

All over the area, at least five types of posters of Amu have been slapped. Islamic Biplabi Andolok has sponsored one such poster.

Elen Bhutto, in sharp contrast, has only one poster printed in black and white, calling upon her husband's supporters to elect her to finish the development works the late lawmaker began.

Power generation reaches all-time high

By Staff Correspondent

Different plants of the Power Development Board (PDB) generated 2,822 megawatts (MW) of electricity yesterday, a new high.

The PDB sources said the power generation level was even with yesterday's peak power demand of 2820 MW.

This new power generation level is possible as the 210 MW second unit at Razzaq plant resumed operations Wednesday. This unit was out of order for several months due to a major technical fault, a result of mis-handling by the plant's operators.

"PDB's power generation performance is improving steadily for the last one month," said a PDB source, "however, power supply in Dhaka continues to be disturbing because the power distribution system here is poor."

Two on remand in connection with plot to kill PM

By Staff Correspondent

The two alleged members of Harkatul Jihad, who were arrested on Wednesday in connection with planting of two bombs at Kotalpara to kill Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, were placed on a four-day remand yesterday.

Machine Tools Factory handed over to Army

By Staff Correspondent

They are Hafez Moulana Abul Hasan of village Bhojgati village under Kotalpara thana in Gopalganj district and Hafez Moulana Abu Taher of Basila in Hazaribagh area in the city. They were produced before the CMM's court yesterday.

Editor: Mahfuz Anam

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Driven by dengue dread, students and teachers at the Viqarunnisa Noon School and College went for a cleaning drive in and around the campus yesterday. Star photo

Crowded commerce ministry

Half the staff is redundant, claims a top official

By Rafiq Hasan

The Ministry of Commerce is overstuffed. 50 per cent of them do not have any work and the parliamentary standing committee on commerce ministry was told yesterday.

Efficiency of the ministry would increase if the staff were reduced by 50 per cent, the committee was further informed.

"There are so many people in the ministry that I do not know who is doing what," Additional Secretary in-charge of the ministry Fazlul Haq said at a briefing session for the standing committee at the Export Promotion Bureau (EPB).

The briefing session was organised to apprise the members of committee about various efforts of the EPB to increase export earning of the country.

Chairman of the standing committee Razi Uddin Ahmed Razu and its members including Mohibur Rahman Manik, Master Majibur Rahman, Akther Hamid Siddiqui and Prof Shahidul Islam attended the briefing.

EPB Vice-chairman A B Chowdhury and other high officials of the bureau were present.

The additional secretary asked EPB officials to visit the ministry frequently and get their work done for increasing export of the country. "A ministry has nothing to do but create.

Honest and dedicated officials should be appointed for long time, he said, adding that

"This vital organisation for increasing and expanding ex-

port should be run by professionals."

The standing committee members underscored the need for gearing up EPB's efforts for increasing export earning. They criticised the commercial councillors at various foreign missions of the country for 'failure' to expand the country's export base and export earnings.

A B Chowdhury referred to different problems faced by exporters. He also pointed out the problems and limitations of the EPB. "Non availability of funds, high rate of bank interest, procedural bottlenecks and price fluctuation in international market are the problems cited by most of the exporters," he said.

Most of the banks were reluctant to provide long term industrial loans, Chowdhury said. Lack of funds is one of the main reasons why backward linkage industries are not developing in the country. More than Tk 100 crore is needed for setting up a composite textile mill but hardly any bank would provide that much money, he added.

The EPB vice-chairman said most of the director-level officials of the EPB did not get promotion in the last 15 years.

"They need promotion and incentives for hard work."

Privatisation
Biman employees announce agitation programme

By Staff Correspondent

Dengue: 37 more admitted to city clinics, hospitals

By Staff Correspondent

Thirty-seven more people with dengue fever were admitted to different hospitals and clinics in the city yesterday.

According to officials, Dhaka Medical College Hospital admitted 13 patients yesterday while Dhaka Shishu Hospital seven.

Suhrawardy Hospital reported admitting two more patients with dengue fever yesterday while BIRDEM reported three new cases.

Samarita, a private hospital admitted four new patients yesterday while Central Hospital three.

Bangladesh Medical College Hospital reported admitting four patients while Ibhne Sina Hospital reported three new cases.

The Nibedita, children's private hospital, admitted one with dengue fever yesterday.

Machine Tools Factory handed over to Army

By Staff Correspondent

GAZIPUR, July 27: Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina today handed over the Bangladesh Machine Tools Factory (BMTF) to Bangladesh Army, reports UNB.

Government wants to build up a self-reliant country through rapid industrialisation. Industrialisation is necessary for poverty-alleviation, the main target of the government, she told a function on the BMTF premises here in the morning.

They are Hafez Moulana Abul Hasan of village Bhojgati village under Kotalpara thana in Gopalganj district and Hafez Moulana Abu Taher of Basila in Hazaribagh area in the city. They were produced before the CMM's court yesterday.

Prayer Timings
July 28

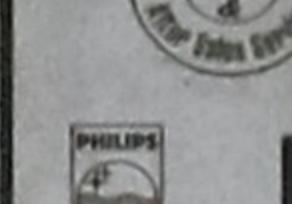
	Azan	Jamaat
Fajr	4-25	4-55
Juma	12-45	1-30
Asr	5-00	5-15
Magrib	6-55	6-58
Esha	8-15	8-45

Source: Islamic Foundation

The Daily Star

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Tea plantation on plain

Increasing domestic demand forces BTB to turn to Panchagarh, also CHT

By Reaz Ahmad, back from Srimangal

Bangladesh plans tea plantation also in its northern region and Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) to increase tea production and retain the market share in tea export, sources in Bangladesh Tea Board (BTB) said.

As BTB has put proposals before the government to expand tea plantation beyond the traditional tea growing areas — Sylhet and Chittagong — some enthusiastic entrepreneurs have already bought lands in Panchagarh for this.

BTB has already conducted a study on prospect of tea plantation in Panchagarh and CHT and submitted a Tk nine crore project for consideration of the government.

As rapid rise in domestic tea consumption is greatly reducing exportable surplus of the commodity, BTB has taken up a

two-pronged strategy to augment production of tea — plantation in new areas and development of drought resistant tea clones.

Talking to a group of news-men, BTB Director AFM Badrul Alam said,

"BT 12 and BT 13 (the two new clones) will withstand drought and pest."

BTB is now supplying the two new tea clones to tea estates. All the 158 tea gardens in the country would get 10 plants each for 'multiplication' in the gardens.

Of the 158 tea gardens, 134

are in greater Sylhet, 22 in

Chittagong, one each in

Rangamati and Bandarban.

Of these, local companies own 55 gardens while companies incorporated in the United Kingdom own 25 gardens. Individuals own 62 gardens.

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Speight may face treason charges

SUVA, July 27: George Speight, who toppled Fiji's elected government in a two-month hostage standoff, may be charged with treason for threatening the life of the country's new president, the military said Thursday, reports AP.

Speight was arrested at a military checkpoint overnight along with three key advisers and a bodyguard, the first step in a crackdown on the rebels who for weeks stirred civil unrest across the country.

"We are going to the root of the matter, we are arresting the people who orchestrated the whole campaign of civil unrest in this country," Tarakini said in a news conference.

He said Speight's arrest followed reports that his group had threatened the life of President Ratu Josefa Iloilo, and had breached an agreement with the military to return all weapons used in the coup, which began May 19 when Speight led an armed gang into Parliament and took dozens of lawmakers hostage.

Tarakini said Iloilo was threatened in connection with Speight's desire to have his supporters installed in the interim government.

"That in itself can be seen as an act of treason," he said.

In the first sign of retaliation against Speight's arrest, rebel supporters took two appropriate New Zealand pilots

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DPRK joins ASEAN Regional Forum

BANGKOK, July 27: North Korea ended decades of international isolation today and joined Asia's leading security forum, raising hope that its opening to the world can bring improve regional peace, reports AP.

US Secretary of State Madeleine Albright hoped to pry open the door further Friday in the highest-level meeting between American and North Korean officials in a half-century of hostility.

Albright planned to seek clarification from North Korean Foreign Minister Paek Nam Sun of the North's recent offer to curb its ballistic missile programme and use it for the peaceful launch of satellites.

The talks have been described by the State Department as introductory and no major deals are expected.

US officials have said that Washington could accept North Korean satellites being launched from neutral sites, such as the South Pacific, but rule out selling boosters or technology that could improve the North's rocketry.

Paek had a whirlwind of meetings over the past two days — including the North's first with a South Korean foreign minister, Lee Jong-bin — and received a big welcome into the regional forum Thursday.

Canada announced diplomatic relations. Australia said it made more sense to have a dialogue than isolate a state that long preferred isolation. Thailand, the host nation, expressed hope that North Korea's entry into the ASEAN Regional Forum would foster regional peace.

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